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# Soviet Army-level Special Purpose Companies (U)

A Defense Research Assessment



Defense Intelligence Agency

DDB-1100-590-87  
May 1987

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## **Soviet Army-level Special Purpose Companies (U)**

### **A Defense Research Assessment**

*This is a Department of Defense Intelligence Document  
Prepared by the Soviet/Warsaw Pact Division,  
Directorate for Research, Defense Intelligence Agency*

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*Information Cutoff Date: 5 February 1987*

*Classified By: Multiple Sources  
Declassify On: OADR*

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## **Soviet Army-level Special Purpose Companies (U)**

### **KEY JUDGMENTS**

(S/NF) The existence of army-level special purpose companies has been confirmed in the Group of Soviet Forces, Germany (GSFG). Commonly called SPETSNAZ (acronym for *SPETSIAL'NOYE NAZNACHENIye* or "special designation"), they are composed of reliable, highly trained personnel who can be used for a wide variety of missions. While army-level SPETSNAZ companies probably are authorized for all Soviet armies, they have been confirmed only in the GSFG and in Afghanistan. Principal capabilities and limitations of army-level SPETSNAZ companies include the following:

- As special reconnaissance assets, SPETSNAZ units significantly enhance the ability of the commander to see the battlefield and are used to locate, conduct surveillance against, and occasionally destroy targets deep in the enemy rear — 0-500 km from the front line of own troops (FLOT) with most of these assets expected to operate 50-300 km.
- Army-level SPETSNAZ companies may be used to support recently developed battle concepts such as reconnaissance strike complexes (RSC), reconnaissance fire complexes (RFC), and operational maneuver groups (OMGs).
- SPETSNAZ forces have limitations related to mobility, fire support, and equipment-carrying capability. Over the short term, it is not envisioned that these will preclude accomplishment of their primary missions of reconnaissance and target location. In order to operate for more than a few days, however, units will have to utilize equipment caches or captured enemy assets.
- The appearance of army-level SPETSNAZ companies is evidently part of the Soviet response to an increased need for accurate, time-sensitive intelligence. In a highly mobile combat environment utilizing modern weapons with increased lethality, ground intelligence provided by SPETSNAZ companies can supplement other intelligence collection and target acquisition assets.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Identification of Army-level Special Purpose (SPETSNAZ) Companies . . . . .	1
SPETSNAZ Tactical Missions . . . . .	1
Employment of SPETSNAZ Companies . . . . .	1
Individual and Unit Training . . . . .	4
Increased Requirement for SPETSNAZ Units . . . . .	6
Conclusions . . . . .	7

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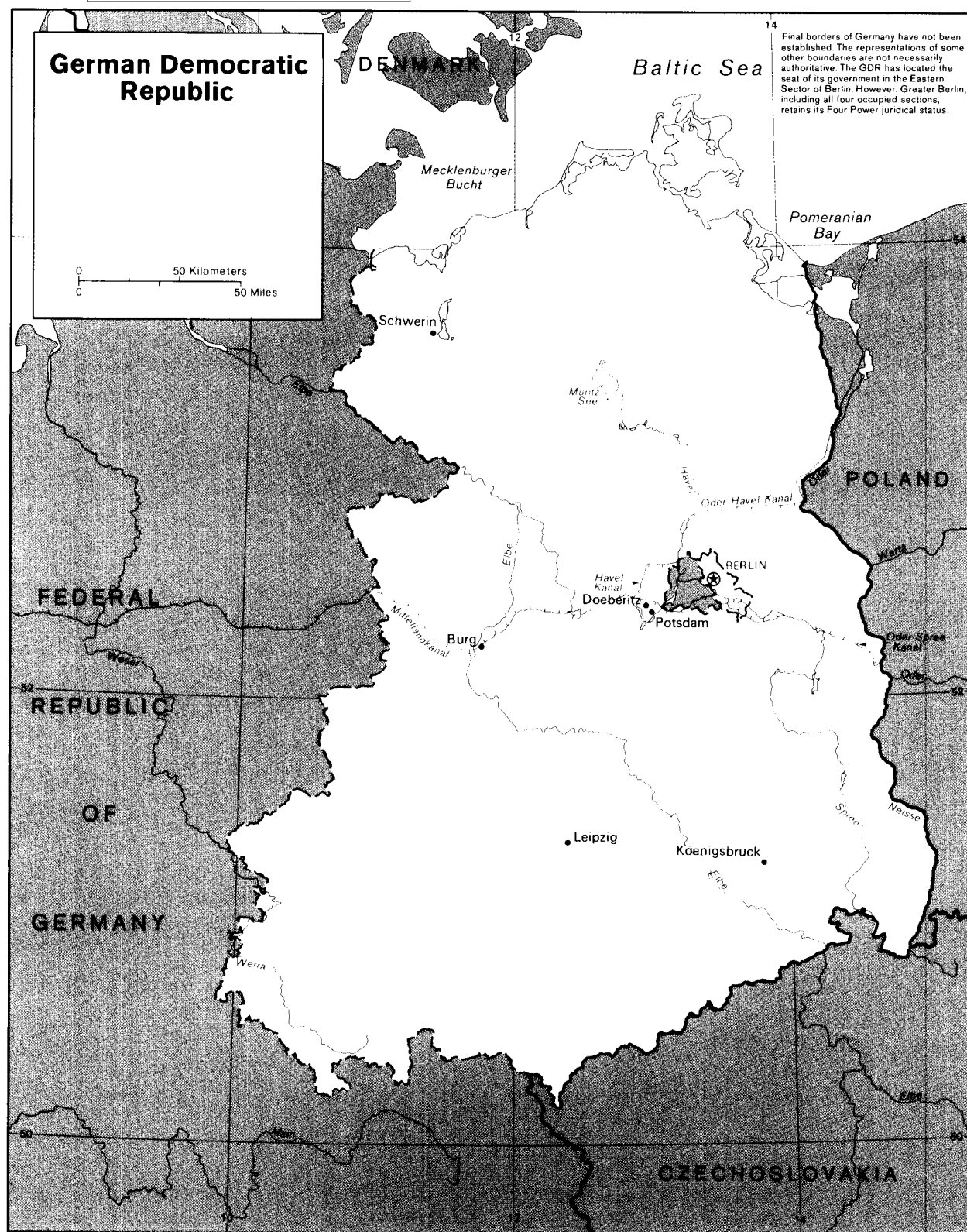


Figure 1. (U) Assessed Location of Army-level SPETSNAZ Companies in the Group of Soviet Forces, Germany (GSFG).

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**Secret****Soviet Army-level Special Purpose Companies (U)****Identification of Army-level Special Purpose (SPETSNAZ) Companies**

(S) Since the late 1970s, there have been reports suggesting the existence of *SPETSNAZ* (*SPETSIAL'NOYE NAZNACHENiye* ("special designation")) companies at army level in the Group of Forces, Germany (GSFG). Recent intelligence has confirmed their presence in East Germany. Such companies reportedly are organized into 8 to 12 special purpose reconnaissance groups (SPRG) of 5-12 men each. Because of their relatively small size (see figures 2 and 3) and similarity in appearance to other reconnaissance and airborne units, these SPETSNAZ companies have been extremely difficult to locate. Such units are now assessed to be stationed in the following areas:

1st Guards Tank Army	Koenigsbruck
2d Guards Army	Schwerin
3d Shock Army	Burg
8th Guards Army	Leipzig
20th Guards Army	Doeberitz

(S) Army-level SPETSNAZ companies have been confirmed only in the GSFG and in the 40th Army in Afghanistan. While these companies probably are authorized for all Soviet armies, DIA has been unable to confirm this. Confirmation of army-level SPETSNAZ companies is difficult because they are relatively small and have no detectable unique equipment holdings; they are difficult to distinguish from army-level air assault units; they are a relatively new formation at army-level; and in some armies they may be at cadre strength or manned only by reservists in peacetime.

**SPETSNAZ Tactical Missions**

(S) The role of the army-level units confirmed

in the NATO Central Region is assessed to be similar to that of the SPETSNAZ brigade found at *front*-level in the GSFG. The primary mission of SPETSNAZ companies, both at *front*- and army-level, is to locate and conduct surveillance on key targets in the enemy's rear area (see figure 4). These units can be used in a variety of situations, however, and may be used to destroy or disrupt key targets in some situations.

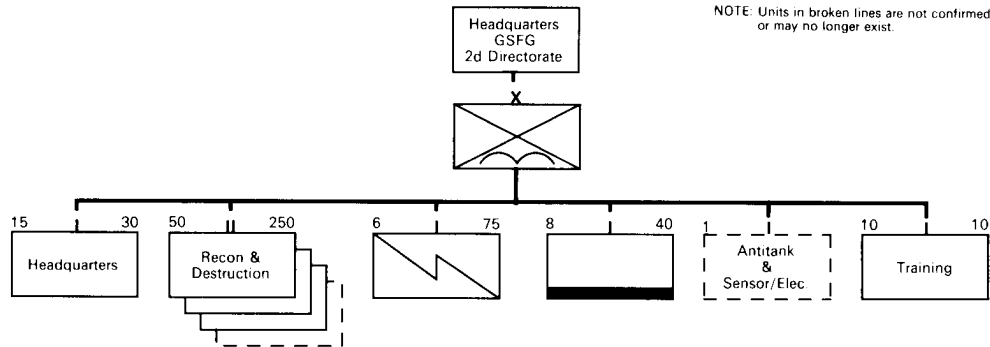
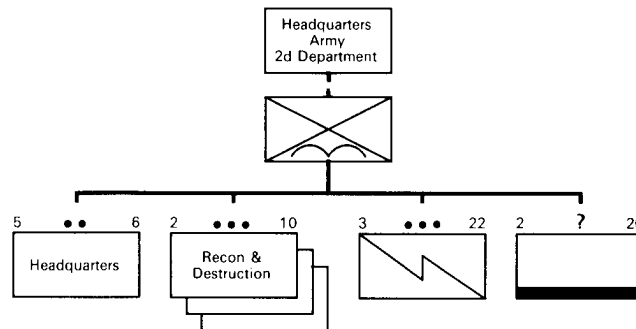
(S) In general order of priority, SPETSNAZ targets are as follows:

- Nuclear delivery means and related command and control assets (mobile ground units and aircraft/airfields).
- Nuclear storage sites.
- Static and mobile HQ.
- Air defense systems.
- Deployed artillery.
- Key storage depots (e.g., ammunition, POL, etc.).
- Key lines of communication (bridges, roads, telephone switching centers).

**Employment of SPETSNAZ Companies**

(S) Doctrinally, army-level SPETSNAZ companies will operate out to 500 km beyond the front line of own troops (FLOT). However, most army-level SPETSNAZ operations against NATO probably will be in the 50-300 km area. This assessment is based on several factors. The first is that an army's immediate objectives are doctrinally located approximately 150 km in the enemy's rear with the subsequent objective being about 300 km deep. A second factor is that in the Central Region, the NATO defensive zone is rather shallow and a large number (in comparison to other potential theaters such as the Far East or Southern) of key NATO targets are expected to be

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**Secret****CONFIDENTIAL****Figure 2. (U) Organization of the GSFG SPETSNAZ Brigade.****CONFIDENTIAL****Figure 3. (U) Organization of the Army-level SPETSNAZ Company.**

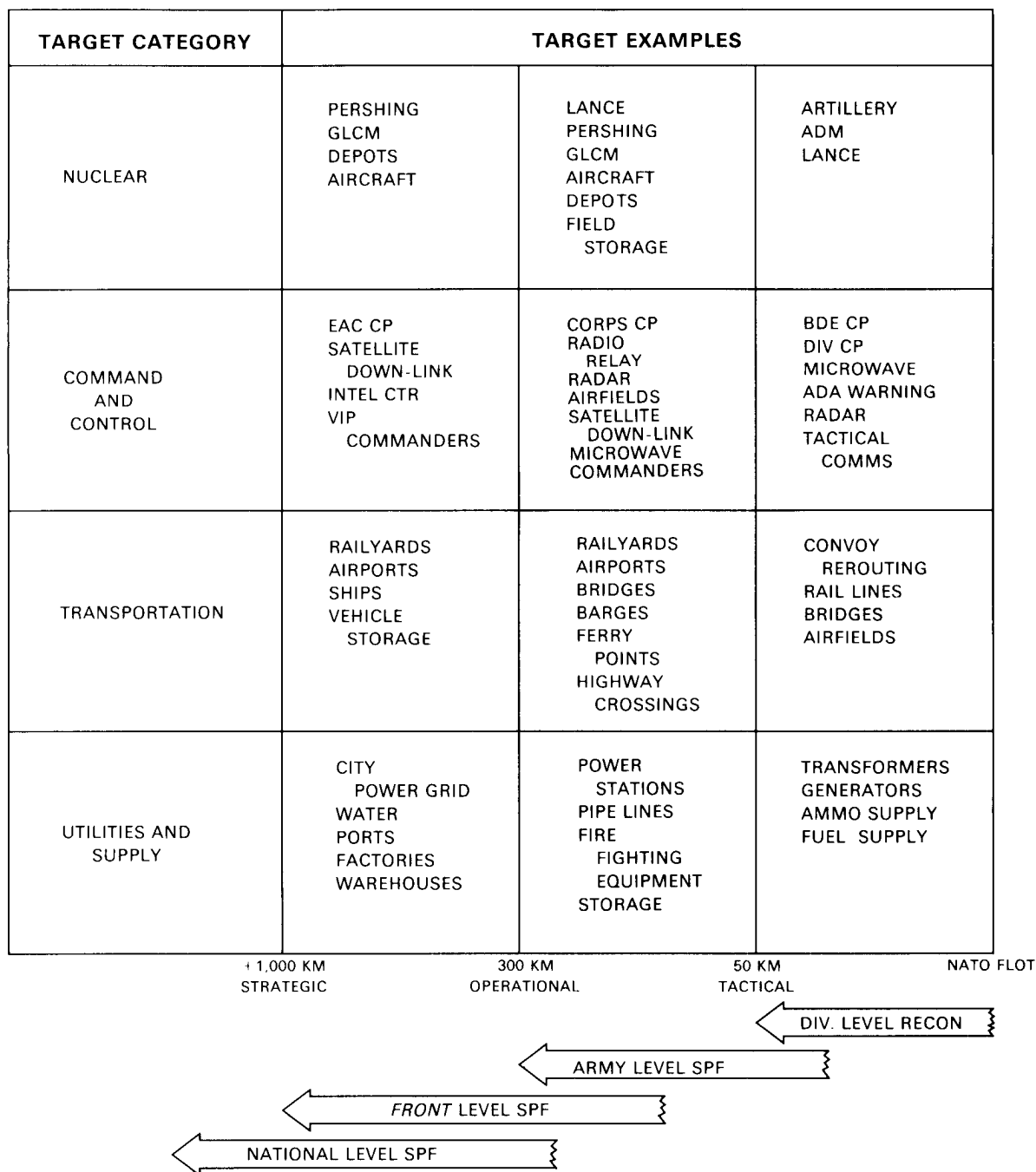
deployed close to the FLOT. Third, an army may employ a force such as an operational maneuver group (OMG) for deep attacks (up to 300 km) into the enemy rear. Fourth, the longest range weapon system organic to the army is the SCUD, a surface-to-surface, short-range ballistic missile which can effectively engage targets out to about 300 km. Thus, targets beyond 300 km that might be identified by army-level SPETSNAZ companies could not be engaged by any organic army asset except the SPETSNAZ company themselves using small arms and man-portable munitions. Finally, organic divisional reconnaissance assets probably will be used in areas up to about 50 km beyond the FLOT, since that distance is the daily goal for a divisional advance.

(S) Army-level SPETSNAZ companies in Europe comprise 8 to 12 special purpose reconnaissance groups (SPRGs). These SPRGs concentrate their efforts on identifying and locating the following

types of units: Lance, Pershing Ia, and Pershing II surface-to-surface missile (SSM) units; HAWK, Nike-Hercules, Patriot, Chapparral, and Roland-2 surface-to-air missile (SAM) and air defense artillery (ADA) units; and the West German *Heimat Schutz* (home protection or territorial defense) brigades. When a target has been located, the SPRG will report its position back to the intelligence directorate at army level and probably will attempt to follow it to its destination if it is on the move. To conserve their reconnaissance value, SPRGs are expected to attack targets with their own weapons only if the target represents an immediate threat and cannot be attacked by other means (such as air, missile, or artillery assets). A Pershing missile preparing for launch would constitute an immediate threat and probably would be attacked by the SPETSNAZ group that located it. Another contingency would be for the controlling authority to order the SPRG to attack a target because other assets were not available.

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**Secret****SECRET****Figure 4. (U) SPF Reconnaissance and Destruction Summary.**

(S) Methods employed by a particular SPRG will vary according to the assigned mission. The composition of an SPRG will also change depending on the specific needs in a particular

situation. For example, if a unit is sent to destroy a bridge, it will be armed and composed of personnel who are trained to accomplish a demolition/sapper mission.

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(S) Army-level SPETSNAZ SPRGs differ very little in composition or mission from the *front*-level SPETSNAZ SPRGs.<sup>1</sup> One difference between *front*- and army-level SPRGs is, of course, the echelon to which they are subordinate and the mission they are assigned to support. The most important difference, however, is the depth of their operations, since *front*-level teams operate out to 1,000 km (see figure 4). Because of this difference of operational depths, targets identified by *front*-level teams probably will be targeted with aircraft or longer range missiles as opposed to army-level artillery or short-range missiles.

(S) SPRGs have limited mobility and equipment-carrying capability and are equipped to operate in a contaminated environment for a very limited period. Thus, SPRGs probably are given a target list and a target area before deployment and receive additional instructions by radio. Within their operational area they are trained to locate their targets through map reconnaissance (to narrow potential target locations), electronic intercept (utilizing portable radio direction-finding and intercept equipment), and prisoner interrogation.

(S) In order to extend the time they can operate in an area, SPETSNAZ companies may make use of a variety of methods. When they are initially inserted in the enemy rear, they may be equipped with extra assets for establishing several caches reserved for use throughout their anticipated mission. In isolated instances, some SPETSNAZ units may receive air resupply in order to carry out a specific mission or to extend their operational time. In other instances, SPRGs may be directed to caches in the enemy rear area that were established prior to hostilities. Finally, SPRGs may attempt to use captured enemy assets in order to accomplish a mission or extend operating time.

(S) Regardless of what methods are employed by a SPETSNAZ company or SPRG, their utility as a combat force is limited by their size and equipment. Furthermore, their utility as a reconnaissance element is limited by their mobility, sustainability, and survivability. SPRGs are very susceptible to destruction once their presence is detected. Since it is difficult to extract them on short notice, they often remain in place until the

FLOT moves forward to their area of operation. Thus, SPETSNAZ units are a supplement to rather than a replacement for other intelligence assets.

### **Individual and Unit Training**

(S/NF) Although many SPETSNAZ personnel are 2-year conscripts, there is a higher density of officers in these units than would be found in a similar size motorized rifle unit. Virtually all SPETSNAZ personnel are airborne qualified and receive some training in reconnaissance procedures, enemy order of battle, map reading, foreign language, common infantry skills (hand-to-hand combat, use of chemical protection devices, marksmanship, etc.), survival techniques, sapper operations, and advanced tactical specialty training (i.e., demolitions, radio operations, sniper, etc.).

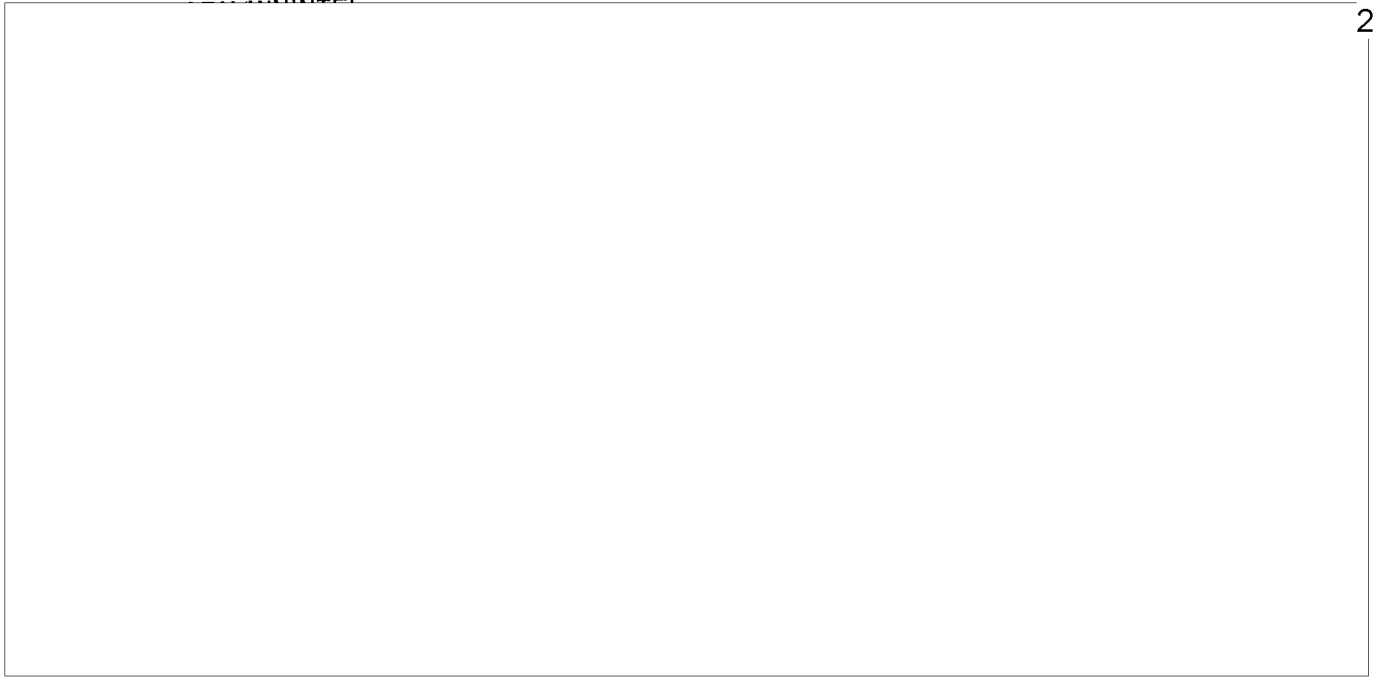
(S/NF) Army-level SPETSNAZ training in Europe is similar to that of *front*-level SPETSNAZ brigades. In the GSFG, there are indications that these units may conduct some joint training. The GSFG SPETSNAZ brigade trains principally at its garrison facility near Furstenberg in East Germany (see figure 5). Training is also conducted at other major training areas such as the Planken portion of the Letzlinger Heide permanently restricted area in East Germany.

(S/NF) While SPETSNAZ conscripts often have some foreign language training, they are assessed to have only a limited capability which enables them to read and speak a foreign language at a level well below native fluency. SPETSNAZ personnel stationed opposite NATO forces reportedly are trained to operate enemy weapon systems and may wear enemy uniforms. While DIA has no evidence indicating SPRG's plan to portray themselves as NATO personnel, SPETSNAZ officers have, in many cases, received training in clandestine/deception missions and may attempt to portray themselves as NATO personnel. Thus, if the need should arise, teams made up of officers and warrant officers (who have better language proficiency and more training than SPETSNAZ conscripts) may wear the uniforms of their enemies as was done by the Germans near the end of World War II. Such deceptive operations, however, are believed to be primarily the province of SPETSNAZ brigades.

<sup>1</sup> (U) See *Operations of Soviet GRU Special Purpose Troops in the Western TVD* (U), DDB-2200-256-84, October 1984, (S) for a more detailed discussion of unit equipment holdings and specialized training.

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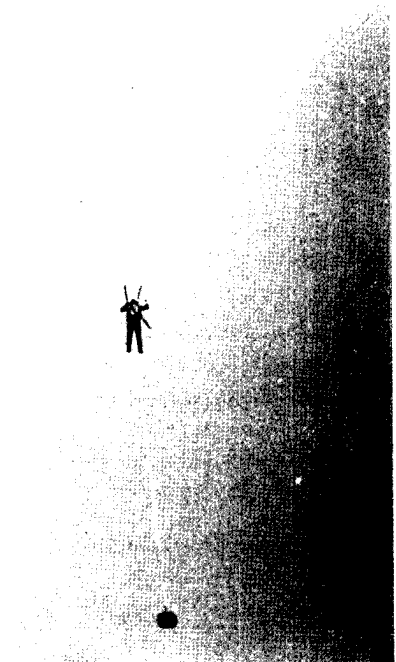
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*Figure 6. (U) SPETSNAZ Soldier Exiting Mi-8/HIP Helicopter.*



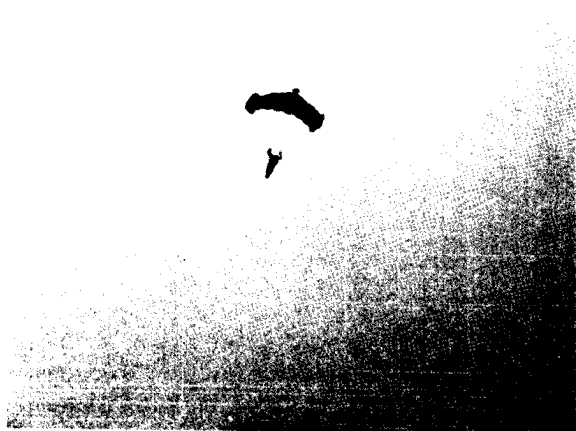
*Figure 7. (U) SPETSNAZ Soldier With Standard Parachute.*

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(S/NF) Each SPETSNAZ soldier receives intensive training in an individual specialty and on any specialized equipment associated with the specialty. At least one SPRG member will be trained on the use of codes and high frequency (HF) burst transmission radios. Other group members may be specially trained to emplace mines, use active and passive night vision devices, or perform simple field surgery. All personnel are expected to carry silenced weapons. Since many SPETSNAZ personnel are conscripts who must receive language training, survival training, parachute training, and specialty training in addition to the basic military skills training, they probably have limited time for training in alternate specialties. While the conscripts are specially selected personnel, they do not serve an extended term; thus their proficiency is limited to that which can be developed in just 2 years.

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**Figure 8. (U) SPETSNAZ Soldier With Steerable Parachute.**

#### **Increased Requirement for SPETSNAZ Units**

(S) There are four factors that may have influenced the formation of army-level SPETSNAZ companies in the Western Theater of Military Operations: the growing availability of theater and tactical nuclear devices and nuclear delivery systems; the deployment of large numbers of precision-guided munitions with increased lethality on both sides; the Soviet perception that an extended conventional phase of war is increasingly likely in any future conflict; and increased

battlefield mobility of forces (with concomitant difficulties for targeting).

(S) More Allied weapons are now capable of firing nuclear munitions, thus increasing the numbers of targets on the battlefield capable of delivering devastating firepower. These, along with the precision-guided munitions, new tactical organizations, and C<sup>3</sup> systems (such as PLSS, Assault Breaker, and automated battlefield intelligence networks) now available to NATO represent a significantly increased threat. Such a large number of targets requires reliable intelligence assets, such as SPETSNAZ, for target acquisition information. SPETSNAZ companies are part of an increased Soviet reconnaissance effort to target these systems.

(S) Whereas nuclear warheads can effectively attack area targets with less precise intelligence than conventional weapons, the growing availability of precision-guided munitions means that a commander can destroy targets with fewer rounds than before, without resorting to the use of nuclear weapons. The SS-21 and SS-23, with their high degree of accuracy, may well be used with conventional warheads to attack high-priority targets. For precision munitions to be effective, however, targets must be precisely located and this increases the need for accurate reconnaissance. While the Soviets have devoted considerable attention to improving virtually all of their reconnaissance assets, ground reconnaissance has a special role to play in modern warfare by providing precise timely target location data.

(S) While SPETSNAZ forces have limitations which impede their effectiveness, such as limited survivability and the ability to protect themselves in a contaminated environment for a very limited period, a prolonged conventional phase of a superpower conflict would, nevertheless, require SPETSNAZ missions. The potential response that would result from the use of nuclear weapons is expected to make a decision by either side to utilize such weapons more difficult. Moreover, the increased destructive power of modern conventional munitions enables a commander to deliver a massive and debilitating strike on the enemy without resorting to nuclear munitions. Hence, the Soviets suggest that these changes increase the probability that a war with NATO will include an extended conventional phase which, in turn, increases the requirement for improved ground reconnaissance which can be provided by intelligence collection assets such as SPETSNAZ.

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(S) The increased mobility of both NATO and Warsaw Pact modern combat formations means that units will relocate frequently, often before technical intelligence assets can precisely target their location. This high mobility environment has increased the requirement for accurate and timely intelligence. Requirements for intelligence have also been increased by the development of new targeting concepts such as the employment of reconnaissance strike complexes and fire complexes (composed of a variety of quick response artillery and missile groups) to engage enemy targets of opportunity. Also, OMGs attacking targets deep in the enemy's rear will require considerable intelligence support, both target intelligence and intelligence on enemy force concentrations that could obstruct the OMG's advance. SPETSNAZ teams, located deep in the enemy rear and equipped with long-range radios, can report precise targeting data to the army or OMG intelligence staff. The army intelligence staff has the necessary communications to immediately pass such targeting data directly to the army or OMG Chief of Missile Troops and Artillery for engagement. Alternatively, the OMG commander may elect to avoid an identified target, especially if it is a large unit. The enhanced mobility on the modern battlefield has significantly increased the need for target intelligence and made such intelligence more time sensitive.

(S) Besides ground reconnaissance, the Soviets have a number of other systems to provide time-sensitive intelligence, such as satellites, aircraft, and electronic intercept. However, each of these systems has shortcomings which can be offset, in part, through the use of ground reconnaissance. Satellite photos can be very accurate but often are not sufficiently responsive for identifying targets of opportunity. While reconnaissance using piloted aircraft or drones can be lucrative, the Soviets cannot be assured an adequate degree of air superiority necessary to conduct real-time reporting in the enemy's rear area. Electronic reconnaissance (such as radio direction-finding units) can be responsive, but their accuracy deteriorates rapidly as distances increase, thus limiting their targeting capabilities. Electronic reconnaissance has the following additional difficulties: it is hard to pinpoint moving targets, it cannot locate targets unless they are electronic emitters, and it cannot rapidly distinguish a single radio van from a key tactical command post. Ground reconnaissance can precisely locate targets and, if necessary, even destroy them using their own assets.

(S) The increased need for reconnaissance on the modern battlefield evidently has resulted in the Soviets seeking to improve their capabilities in a number of areas. The demand for flexible ground reconnaissance assets probably has influenced the decision to give the army commander his own dedicated SPETSNAZ company.

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*Figure 9. (U) SPETSNAZ Soldier.*

### **Conclusions**

(S) The SPETSNAZ companies at army level in the GSFG will respond primarily to the needs of their respective army commanders. They can be expected to operate at depths of 0-500 km, but most of their operations will be 50-300 km beyond the FLOT.

(S) Army-level SPETSNAZ companies stationed in Europe have missions — and capabilities — similar to those of SPETSNAZ brigade elements. This includes both reconnaissance and destruction roles. Principal differences between these echelons are the depth of their operations, assets used to attack targets they identify, and their controlling headquarters. Their principal targets are nuclear-capable units and equipment, and static and mobile headquarters.

(S) Army-level SPETSNAZ units have several limitations. They have limited mobility once they are inserted into the enemy rear area. They can obtain fire support from army-level assets only out to about a depth of 300 km (effective range for the SCUD surface-to-surface missile) and must be supported by *front*-level assets in order to

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engage targets out to their full 500 km operational area. SPETSNAZ companies are also limited in the amount of equipment they can transport, which means they carry little protective equipment for use in contaminated environments and fewer munitions than normally would be found in a motorized rifle company. They have some language capability, but their proficiency is well below native fluency. Finally, unit personnel will be limited in their ability to function in positions other than their own tactical specialty.

(S) On the other hand, army-level SPETSNAZ companies are well trained in their specific tasks and are quite flexible in how they can be employed. While their principal mission is expected to be reconnaissance, in some instances they may attack enemy forces with organic weapons. Their

limited language training may assist them during operations and they may use captured weapons and uniforms to disguise themselves. However, there is no direct evidence that they will attempt to pass themselves as NATO troops.

(S) The creation of army-level SPETSNAZ units in the GSFG probably was motivated by the increased need for more timely reconnaissance and targeting information. They have important utility to the operations of reconnaissance strike complexes, reconnaissance fire complexes, and operational maneuver groups. SPETSNAZ units give the army commander a greater ability to see the battlefield to its full depth and assist in targeting enemy elements with long -range, precision weaponry.

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(U) Each classified title and heading has been properly marked; all those unmarked are unclassified.

(U) This study has been fully coordinated with the Directorates for Estimates and Scientific and Technical Intelligence.

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			B822	1	DIA/DIA REP PACOM	C646	3	DIA/DIA REP PACOM	C646	3	CACDA	I040	1	SOCCENT						
			B823	1	DIA/DIA REP SHAPE	C667	1	DIA/DIA REP SHAPE	C667	1	USAFJCSWC	J005	1	USCINCLANT						
			B824	1	DIA/DIA REP SAC	C683	1	DIA/DIA REP SAC	C683	1	INTEL CTR&SCH	J010	1	COMUSFORCARIB						
			B825	1	DIA/DIA REP EUCOM	C684	2	DIA/DIA REP EUCOM	C684	2	USALSD	J500	1	CINCLANTFLT						
			B856	2	USDAO BRUSSELS	C697	1	USDAO BRUSSELS	C697	1	TEST & EVAL COMD	J515	1	FICELURANT						
			B917	1	USDAO WARSAW	C700	1	USDAO WARSAW	C700	1	CTF	J582	1	II MAR AMPHIB FOR						
						C715	1		C715	1	ARMOR CTR	K005	10	USCINCPAC						
						C748	1		C748	1	HQDA DAMI-FRT	K006	1	COMSOCPAC						
						C757	1		C757	1	SED	K010	1	USFK						
						C759	1		C759	1	INSCOM/IAOPS-H-C	K101	1	PACAF/INOI						
						C765	1		C765	1	HQDA DAMI-FIT	K117	1	18TH TFW						
						C766	1		C766	1	HQDA DAMI-FIC	K300	1	IPAC (LIBRARY)						
						C768	3		C768	3	ITAC (LIBRARY)	K302	1	USAWESTCOM						
						C786	1		C786	1	HQDA DAMI-FIW	K313	2	IPAC (CODE 1A)						
						C788	3		C788	3	HQDA DAMI-FII/S	K314	1	IPAC (CODE PI)						
						C798	1		C798	1	1ST(BN) 1 SFGA	K317	1	IPAC/IT3						
						C799	1		C799	1	1ST MI CO 1ST SFGA	K320	1	USARJAPAN						
						C813	2		C813	2	USAFS AUGSBURG	K500	1	CINCPACFLT						
						C814	1		C814	1	DA SCI RESEARCH	K505	1	FICPAC						
						U.S. NAVY			U.S. NAVY			K515	1	COMSEVENTHFLT						
						D002	1		D002	1	OP 91 (DNM)	K520	1	LFTCPAC						
						D150	1		D150	1	CMC (INTP)	K601	1	FIRSTMAW						
						D184	1		D184	1	NAVSTRKWARCEN	K605	1	FMPAC						
						D202	1		D202	1	NAVWARCOL/LIB	K611	1	CG FIRST MAB						
						D249	1		D249	1	NAVPGSCOL	K612	1	THIRDMARDIV						
						D263	1		D263	1	NOSC	K632	1	THIRD MAF						
						D579	1		D579	1	FIRSTPAC D571	K658	1	COMUSNAVPHIL						
						D900	1		D900	1	NAVOPINTCEN	K710	1	FISC WESTPAC						
						D902	1		D902	1	NAVOPINTCEN DET NP	K746	1	FIRSTADBN						
						D971	1		D971	1	OP-009P	K966	1	VFA-125(42GG)						
											L005	1	HQ SAC (INO)							
											L006	1	SAC/IN							
											L040	1	SAC 544 SIW/DAA							
											L044	1	HQ SAC/INA							
											L049	1	544 IAS/IAAC							
											L103	1	5 BMW/IN							
											L107	1	8 AF/IN							
											L110	1	15 AF/IN							
											L122	1	93 BMW/IN							
											M005	10	USCINCSO							
											N005	1	USREDCOM							
													OTHERS							
													P002	2	NPIC/IB					
													P018	1	NPIC/IEG/SSWFETVD					
													P020	3	NPIC/IEG/N/NW/TVD					
													P055	14	CIA/OCRA/DSO/DB					
													P057	5	CIA/SOVA/TWA/RP					
													P079	2	STATE INR/PMIA					
													P082	1	STATE EA&PAC AFF					
													P090	10	NSA/IS15/CDB					
													P091	1	NSA REP DEFENSE					
													P112	1	WH MILITARY OFF					
													P202	1	CIA/NIO/GPF					
													Q008	1	NISC					
													Q043	1	AFMIC					
													Q420	1	FTD/STIS					
													Q591	1	FSTC					
													Q619	1	MSIC REDSTONE					
													S003	1	SANDIA LABS					
													S030	1	FRD LIB OF CONG					
													333	CUST'S	649	COPIES				

## DISTRIBUTION LIST (MICROFICHE)

DOD AND JOINT AGENCIES	C307	1	24TH INF DIV	U.S. AIRFORCE	K342	1	2ND INF DIV
	C314	1	513TH MIG		K413	1	MAG 12 46C1
A363 1 USNMR SHAPE	C351	1	10TH SFG (ABN) 1STSF	E100 30 TAC 480 RTG/INPPD	K426	1	MACG-18
	C417	1	7TH INF DIV	E567 1 6985 ESS	K700	1	SEVENTH MAB
DIA	C442	1	USAFS MISAWA	E575 1 6994 ESS/DOA	L040	2	SAC 544 SIW/DAA
	C500	1	TRADOC	E706 1 HQ ESC/INYQ			
B331 1 DIA/RTS-2A2	C539	1	TRASANA		OTHERS		
B352 5 DIA/RTS-2F	C644	1	LOG CTR	UNIFIED AND SPECIFIED COMMANDS	P002	1	NPIC/IB
B813 1 DIA/DL-5 JAPAN	C667	1	USAJFKSWC		Q591	1	FSTC
B913 1 USDAO ISLAMABAD	C768	1	ITAC (LIBRARY)	H010 1 SOTFE (J-2)			
B934 1 USDAO MOSCOW	C772	1	HQDA DAMI-FIO	H303 1 204TH MI BN			
				H524 1 HQ V CORPS			
ARMY				1005 1 USCINCCENT	39	CUST'S	73 COPIES
				1040 1 SOCCENT			
C242 1 FORSCOM	D039	1	FOURTH MAW/MARTC	J502 1 COMSECONDFLT			
C247 1 THIRD US ARMY	D700	1	CGMCDCEC	K300 1 IPAC (LIBRARY)			

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